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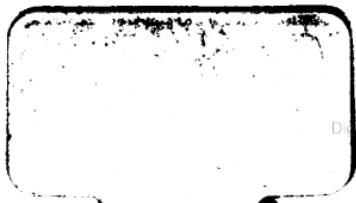


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Lady Estabrook

JEANETTE WHEELER

W. C. WICKER



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LADY ESTABROOK



BY

JEANNETTE WHEELER

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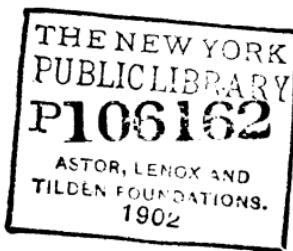
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JEANNETTE WHEELER

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

Jeannette Classon was born in the little town of Reedsville, Wis., not far from Manitowoc. Her childhood days were spent in Peoria, Ill., her school days in Geneseo, Ill. It was while here she commenced writing stories.

While still young she was telegraph operator on the commercial line, in the little town of Buda, Ill. Later a school-teacher. Then she married J. F. Wheeler, moved west on to a farm, from which they have lately retired, and with more leisure has come back the old love for writing stories.

THE PUBLISHERS.

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LADY ESTABROOK.

PART I.

THE STORM CHILD.

IT was a bitter night in March,
The winter had been long and cold,
But this most eventful night
Was unusually severe and bold.

We were a happy household group,
And had gathered close round the fire
Watching the blazing logs,
As the flames leaped ever higher.

How the blaze lit up the rafter
In that kitchen rude and warm !
Rude? yes, but not for a palace
Would I have changed the dear old farm.

There were mother and father
And the dear old grandmother,
And there, on a stool at my side,
Was Roger, my only brother.

I was twelve years old that winter,
Roger was only eight.
We amused ourselves by reading
And drawing pictures on the slate.

Roger had been reading to me
A tale of Fairyland.
"And is it true?" he cried,
As he eagerly grasped my hand.

The bright and happy look
For a moment left his face
As I answered him, "No,
'Tis only an imaginary place."

Not long had he for disappointment,
Something more real engrossed his
mind,
Filling him with strange ideas
And Fairyland was left behind.

For with the sobbing of the wind,
There came a low knock at the kitchen
door,
And as father hastened to open it
A woman's form sank to the floor.

And close within her arms
She held a little child,
Close wrapped within her own garments,
To shield it from the storm so wild.

The babe had not been chilled,
Was warm, happy, and bright,
And when Roger talked to her
She laughed with childish delight.

Instinctively the two were friends,
And the dimpled arms so white
She twined about his neck
On that strange, eventful night.

The woman was cared for all that night,
For she with a fever was raging wild,
Wringing her hands
And calling for her child.

But when the babe was brought,
She turned away and said,
"This cannot be my child,
For my little Mabel is dead."

Father tried to learn of her
From whence she came,
But fruitless were his efforts,
He could not learn the stranger's name.

But dark, mysterious death
Soon claimed her for his own,
And her spirit floated out
To the land of the unknown.

They bore her to the graveyard
Just over on the hill,
Where over many mounds
The moon shines cold and still.

And now a smooth white stone
Is there at the head of the grave,
And gracefully over the mound
A willow tree and rose bush wave.

The child was about a year old,
Could talk a little and run alone,
And mother having only us two boys,
Concluded to adopt her for their own.

They called the child Mable,
Little Mable St. Clair;
And even now a vision rises before me
Of dark brown eyes and rippling hair.

Ah, Mable, little Mable St. Clair;
With your velvet eyes and rippling hair.
An angel in our home thou wert,
With your sunny ways and pure true
heart.

PART II.

I AM ONLY A WAIF.

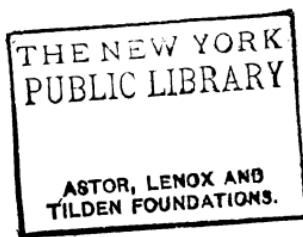
Fourteen years had now passed away,
With their changing seasons sad and gay ;
For five years I had been abroad,
And was glad to again touch America's
sod.

Roger was still at the dear old farm
With his willing heart and strong young
arm ;
The old place had been altered some,
And was now a much more modern home.

Mother seemed just as fair to me,
And her smile just as sweet to see,
As when long ago in boyhood days
She watched me at my childish plays.

Father's step grew feeble each day ;
The once black hair was silvery gray,





But just as chivalrous as when in days of
old
He courted mother with her locks of gold.

And Mable with her nut-brown hair,
Pushed back from a brow wondrous fair,
And her eyes full of happy joyous light,
Cheeks as red as the roses bright.

A joy to our home she proved to be,
No sorrow could dwell with one gay as
she ;
I saw how she lightened mother's care
As she flitted about here and there.

Good teachers had been provided for Mable,
For our parents felt they were amply able
To do by her as one of their own.
And rich was the harvest from the seed
sown.

She knew she was not their own child,
Mother told her how she came in the
storm so wild ;

'Twas better by her the tale to be told
Than wait for a stranger the same to un-
fold.

I think she loved them all the more
And was even more grateful than before.
Gentle and kind was her greeting to me,
The same as that of a sister might be.

Roger she always called her brother,
And they seemed fond of each other;
Aye, more than that, I soon could see,
And the knowledge came all at once to me.

Roger gave her a love strong and true,
But if Mable returned it would it do?
Would our parents unite their family
With one that knew not whom her parents
might be.

The name of St. Clair bore no disgrace,
But belonged to an old and noble race,
High notions of honor had father and
mother,
And I had many fears for my only
brother.

I knew that Mable was gentle and good,
Blossoming to noble womanhood,
And whatever her station in life might be,
Whether of high or low degree,

Thus far she was worthy of Roger St.
Clair—

Little Mable with her nut-brown hair.
Roger was noble and I loved him well ;
But let our lives, not our parentage, tell

Whether with kings or knaves we should
go,
For we are just what we make ourselves
here below.

It is not what a man or woman may in-
herit,

That wins for them the real true merit.

God means us all to be noble,
Aye, even kingly, meant He,
When He bestowed on us power
And dominion over land and sea.

And then these glorious lives
Not ours to waste were they given,

But to guard and cherish here
And fit the soul for heaven.

Even thus I knew Mable felt it to be,
And well proved her own nobility,
And whether the daughter of peasant or
peer,
Her pages in life were pure and clear.

Mable was young, and Roger would wait,
But first he felt he must learn his fate ;
For Mable would go to school in Glenburn,
And he could not wait for her to return

To tell her the hope of all his life,
And win her consent to be his wife.
Oh, love ! how sweet, how pure thou art
When first thou com'st to the human
heart.

Love is an eager, restless fire,
And, fed aright, mounts ever higher ;
But if not it molders slowly away,
Leaving only ashes cold and gray.

'Twas the close of a warm, bright summer day,
When the birds were singing their evening lay,
He found her in her favorite nook,
'Neath a wide-spreading willow near a babbling brook.

She turned to meet him with a smile,
The evening sunset lit her brow the while;
"Am glad to see you, brother mine,
A penny for those thoughts of thine."

"I claim it; sit thee down by me,
And I will tell my thoughts to thee;
For I am sad, yes, sad this eve,
That you, little Mable, so soon will leave.

"And are you so willing to leave all here?
Do you not care that the parting is near?
Mable, we all love you so well;
Had you rather go away among strangers to dwell?"

“Hush, Roger,” and the bright eyes grew
dim

As she raised them imploringly to him.

“You know how I love the home here,
And never another could be as dear.

“Your parents wish it, you know,
Why should you hate to have me go?
I should like some day to be wise as thee,
So you need never be ashamed of me.

“You will not miss me,” she said,
Laughingly shaking her curly head.
“Edwin will soon bring his bride here,
And she will become to all so dear

“That you will scarce miss me
In the fairy presence of one gay as she.
And what is a year? ’Twill soon pass
away,
And hardly seem more than a brief
summer day.”

“And what is Edwin’s bride to me?
How can she banish thoughts of thee!

Mable, you are right in wanting to go,
Only, why should you not care when it
pains me so?"

" Roger, to care for me so you are kind,
And a better friend I shall never find,
And you will ever be my brother dear;
That you may be ashamed of the title
have no fear."

Then by the brooklet with willows o'er-
grown,
He now took the dimpled hand in his own—
" Mable, the title of brother won't do;
I want to be more than that to you..

" I love you, I want you to be my wife,
Oh, say that you will and bless my life."
" Roger, Roger," she whispered low,
" I cannot say yes, it must be no.

" And don't let your eyes have that look
of pain;
Forget these words ere we meet again.

Your wife you know I cannot be,
For who knows anything of me?

“ Only a waif brought to your door!
Forget me, Roger, I implore.”

“ Only a waif!” and his eyes grew wild.
“ Don’t speak of that when I love you so,
child.

“ Who you are, what is that to me?
And what care I who your parents may
be?”

“ Roger, be brave for your parents’ sake,
And let them not know of this mistake.

“ Care for them tenderly, for they are old,
Parents’ love, Roger, is more than gold.”
“ Then I make a mistake in loving you.
Look up, Mable, say, is this true?”

“ Yes, Roger,” and her voice was low,
And her face grew white in the twilight
glow.

She caught his hand within her own,
As he would have left her there alone.

“Stay, Roger, and only tell me,
That you will still my brother be.”
“Yes, Mable,” he whispered now,
And gently kissed the pure white brow.

PART III.

YOU ARE LADY ESTABROOK.

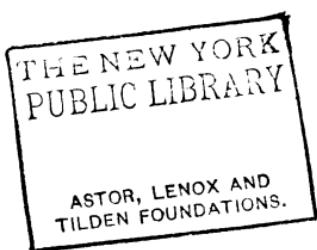
LISTEN to the peal of wedding bells,
What a tale of joy their melody tells ;
And overhead the sky is clear,
While all around me are faces dear.

And best of all, here by my side,
In snowy robes, is my lovely bride,
The pastor's voice making us one for life,
As he solemnly pronounces us man and wife.

A short time after we had settled down,
And the guests had all returned to town,
Helen, my bride, looked at Mable and said :
" She reminds me so much of a sister long dead.

" Hers was a painful history,
And shrouded still in mystery.
Here is a picture taken years ago,
When I was but a little child, you know."





Mother held the picture near the light,
Asked for the story, while her face grew
white.

There was the face of her who brought the
child,

Long ago while the storm beat wild.

“ It pains me much to speak of her,
But some way to-night old memories stir,”
And she told the tale with tearful eyes,
While Mable listened with surprise.

“ Edith had a lover who came from Eng-
land’s shore,
And received no welcome at our door ;
'Twas rumored that he was Lord Esta-
brook,
But father heard with a haughty look.

“ However, they fled away one night,
When the clouds just hid the moon’s pale
light ;
They married and went to Chelsea to live,
And father vowed he would never forgive.

“ At the end of the year there was joy in
their home,
For then a little dark-eyed girl had come.
And then we heard of them no more
Till Estabrook suddenly came to our door.

“ His tale filled us all with surprise and
regret
That Edith so sad a fate had met.
He told how his father, a proud old man,
Belonged to a noble English clan.

“ He chose from the peerage a wife for his
son,
But the lady had never the lad’s heart won,
So he left his home and his irate sire
And in Edith found his heart’s desire.

“ He told how happy the past two years
Had glided for them without care or fears,
Until he was summoned away
And met with unexpected delay.

“ In his absence an enemy made her believe
He had married her with intent to deceive;

That he was a noble by birth,
And had left forever their happy hearth.

“ And when he returned not a trace
Could he find of Edith’s loved face.
Sadly the father told his tale,
And ended with a bitter wail.

“ ‘ I’ve a letter from home to bring wife and
child,
For father to me is reconciled.
And I go to settle my estate,
Clasp mother once more ere it be too late.

“ ‘ She is very feeble, they say,
And I cannot linger another day,
But if anything of my folks you learn,
Send to me quickly and I will return.’

“ My father grasped his hand and said,
‘ Forgive me now they may be dead,’
All this was many years ago
And father has searched to and fro ;

“Sent messages far and near,
But nothing of the lost ones could we
hear.”

And Helen sadly drooped her head,
“We have long had fears that both are
dead.”

When Helen finished mother said,
“The *child* is *here*; she is not dead;
For she and Mable are one and the same
And alone entitled to Lord Estabrook’s
name.

“And though Mable to us is dear
We must send for her father to come here,
And we must be willing with her to part,
For the sake of cheering his lonely heart.

“Mable, look up, my child,” she said,
And stooped to raise the graceful head,
“Let me see, my child, how you look,
For you are Lady Estabrook.”

“Don’t, mother,” she said, “I am happy here,

And cannot part with all so dear.”

She looked at Roger and a sudden light Crept into the eyes already so bright.

I pitied Roger with all my heart,
For I knew that he and Mable must part;
And for her to cross the sea to dwell
Would pain him sore, for he loved her well.

But if Mable loved him she would not forget,

And I hoped the tangles might all be smoothed yet.

A message was sent to Lord Estabrook
And for him or a letter we soon might look.

PART IV.

THE LOVER'S WELCOME.

THE warm August sun was sinking to rest
Behind the hills that in green were
dressed,
The lingering red and purple light
Made the window panes most dazzling
bright.

Father, mother, Helen and I,
Were chatting and watching the changing
sky ;
Mable and Roger came in from a walk,
And we could hear their laugh and talk.

I wish I could describe Mable to you
So you could think of her and justice do ;
The rippling waves of dark-brown hair,
Were pushed back from the brow so fair.



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The smiles and dimples chased each other
As she chatted gaily with my brother.
She was dressed in a muslin airy and light,
While at her throat were rosebuds bright.

Methought as I noted the white hand on
the gate,
'Twas fit to belong to some lady great.
On the evening silence there came a sound
Of horses' hoofs upon the ground.

Then soon a carriage came in sight
And stopped for a stranger to alight;
In the twilight now grown so late
He could dimly see the faces at the gate.

Addressing them he said,
"This, I believe, is the St. Clair home-
stead,"
On that never-to-be-forgotten night
When we entered the room where it was
light.

Helen said, extending her hand,
"Lord Estabrook, you come quick from a
foreign land."

Then Mable, who had slipped away in the
gloom
Came gracefully into the room.

That Lord Estabrook was of noble race,
One could quickly see by his handsome
face,

A striking resemblance to him Mable bore,
The same expression each countenance
wore.

Only a moment he gazed at that face,
Then clasped her close in a long embrace,
"My daughter, my long-lost treasure,"
said he,
"To think all these years I've been parted
from thee."

Then once more the story was told,
How Mable was brought in the storm and
cold,

“Look up, my darling,” said he, “look;
I would see the lost Lady Estabrook.

“Ah, yes, they are one and the same,
And you alone have a right to the name;
Old Estabrook Hall shall have a mistress
once more,
As soon as we reach the English shore.

“And though I am sorry for the good
folks here,
For I know to them you must be dear,
Yet 'tis best for you to go with me,
And see your home across the sea.”

The suffering of Roger then
I cannot portray with my pen,
For she was no longer Mable St. Clair,
But Lady Estabrook, mistress of lands
broad and fair.

After passing a sleepless night,
He was up as soon as it was light,
And wandered down to the willow side,
Where he had asked Mable to be his bride.

But, wakeful as he might be,
There was another restless as he.
" Roger," a soft voice said ;
And then he slowly raised his head.

" Roger, my brother," she cried,
Going close to his side ;
" I cannot bear this look of pain,
Let me not see it in your face again.

" You have no reason to be so sad,
When I, oh Roger, am so glad ;
Mar not my happiness,
But please ask God Mable to bless."

" God ever bless you, Mable dear,
But I cannot be glad and the parting so
near ;
And though you had no love for me,
I could at least your dear face see.

" But now you are going so far away,
Oh, pity my weakness, Mable, I pray."
" Roger, Roger," she whispered low,
If you bid me stay I will never go.

“ For don’t you know, if friend of mine,
Don’t you know my love is thine ;
Roger, I tell you true,
I have suffered as much as you.”

“ Mable, can it be true ?
Am I indeed so much to you ? ”

“ Yes ; finding my father, don’t you see,
Removes the objections to wedding me.”

“ But, Mable, don’t you know
That you to another land must go,
And when the great wide sea
Shall divide you and me ;

“ When you are among great and noble
men,

Will you think of poor Roger then ? ”

“ Poor ! look at these lands ;
Noble ; ” and she grasped his hands ;

“ None more noble than you, dear,
That I shall forget you never fear.
Nobleness is goodness,
What are pomp, title, and dress ?

“ I care not for title and fame
Only a pure, unspotted name ;
I am sure father thinks so, too ;
But he comes, I leave him with you.”

She tripped away with foot light as a
feather,
Leaving the two together.
Roger told his love while the father
listened,
Watching the deep dark eyes that glisten-
tened.

“ Roger, my boy,” said Lord Estabrook,
And took his hand, which he heartily
shook,
“ You are worthy of her, I know,
And I give you my blessing before I go.

“ Mable is very young, you know,
And 'tis best for a time with me should go,
But if she loves you she will be
As true as steel, I know, to thee.

“ I read it in her lovely face,
For already a noble mind I trace ;
And with not one word will I mar her joy ;
I have seen enough of that, my boy.

‘ And for the sake of her in yonder grave,
Where the willow-tree and rose-bush wave,
For the sake, too, of the daughter so dear
to me,
I promise faithfully to thee

“ That if in two years you come to Eng-
land,
And still love each other, you shall have
her hand.

Two years will not seem very long,
For Mable is young, and you are strong.”

“ Oh, thank you, thank you,” Roger said,
As he gracefully raised his hat from his
head.

Then back to the house they wended their
way,
And Estabrook planned for sailing next
day.

PART V.

FATHER AND CHILD.

WHO is this in glistening halls,
That is ever fairest at the balls ;
Who, for her kind deeds and gentleness
The poor are ever ready to bless ?

Many lovers had she,
But the maiden's heart dwelt across the
sea ;
'Tis Mable, her diamonds glittering in the
light,
Her face just now unusually bright.

For this grand ball was a welcome,
For her lover to her English home ;
Together they opened the ball,
The fairest couple in the hall.

No need had she to blush for him,
Noble of mind, graceful of limb ;



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Surely, Lord Estabrook,
You may well proudly on your daughter
look.

For royally she has done her part,
This dearest treasure of your heart ;
In England Mable and Roger dwelt,
Each for the St. Clairs the deepest love
felt.

Two little children at Estabrook halls,
Now shout and play within the old walls ;
Estabrook's face loses its look of pain,
And with these little ones seems to renew
life again.



